

Notetaking Strategies

Knowing how to take effective notes is crucial for success in university. The key to good note taking is to keep your notes simple, easy to read, and organized so that you can easily find information when you need it. Only take notes on information that really matters; pay attention to new terms and key concepts repeated by your instructor.

Below are some general guidelines for effective notetaking as well as an explanation of three common methods. The most important thing is that your notes make sense to you, so try different methods and modify them as needed.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE NOTETAKING

- Notes should be brief and easy to read.
 - Only take notes on information you need.
 - **Don't** just copy off the lecture slides. Take notes on what is most important, such as the additional information that your instructor has said in class.
- Focus on important concepts and terms rather than minor points or extra details
 - Organize related points consistently.
 - E.g., use different colours for main ideas, supporting ideas, and sub-points.
- If information can be categorized into distinct sections, use a grid or table.
- Simplify wording. Leave out any unnecessary words and use abbreviations and symbols.
 - Make sure you understand what each symbol or abbreviation means.
 - E.g., write “bc” instead of “because” or “w” and “w/o” for “with” and “without.”
 - This will help you save time!

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID:

As mentioned above, knowing how to take good notes is a key to academic success. Here's a short list of common mistakes students make. These are ineffective notetaking strategies, and you should avoid them:

1. Taking a photograph of the board

- ***Without a signed release form, students are not allowed to take pictures/film class materials as materials are considered the instructor's intellectual property. Taking pictures and videos may also invade other students' privacy.**
- Also, writing or typing out notes in your own words helps you process information to remember it better later. Taking a photograph is not going to help you learn as well, even if you read it later.
- Additionally, the board doesn't include information brought up by your instructor during the lecture and class discussion.

2. Taking notes in other languages

- Writing notes in any language other than English will prevent you from fully understanding key concepts. In fact, when looking at notes written in another language, it may make you confused as you try to remember exactly what was discussed in class in English.
- Instead, writing notes in English will help you to develop and improve your English skills. Doing so will also make it easier for you to remember and discuss concepts so that you can engage with your class and class materials. As well, practicing your English skills with notetaking will make it much easier for you to write your assignments!

3. Relying on the Power Point slides

- Like taking a picture of the board, only reading through slides will not help you remember material as well as writing notes will, and the slides don't contain everything covered in a class.
- While content on slides is important, use it as a frame to guide your notes, not as the only thing you write down or pay attention to.

OUTLINE METHOD

This document has been using the outline method to present information in an organized way. Using indents and bullet points, the outline method categorizes information to show the relationships between key points, concepts, and terms, and related points and details. Well-organized notes are easier to use later for studying and writing assignments.

How to use the Outline Method:

- When an important topic, concept, or term is introduced, write it as a main heading in your paper.
 - Below that heading, organize related points. Indent the line to show that it is a sub-point connected to the overall concept above.
 - To expand on the sub-point, indent again and write additional details.
 - When another sub-point or key point is introduced, reduce the indent so that it is clear you are moving to a new idea.
- You can use bullet points, dashes, arrows, numbers, or letters to identify points in your notes.
 - One method involves using Roman numerals (I, II, etc.), capital and lowercase letters, and numbers to categorize sections of information.

Here is an example of how to organize notes in this format:

I. Rule Utilitarianism

- A. Right actions determined by whether or not they conform to optimal rule
 - a. Optimal rule is rule that usually generates greatest good when everyone complies
- B. Challenges:
 - a. Determining optimal rule
 - b. What about exceptions?
 1. Following rules can generate more harm

This method would still work with simple bullet points:

- Rule Utilitarianism
 - Right actions determined by whether or not they conform to optimal rule
 - Optimal rule is rule that usually generates greatest good when everyone complies
 - Challenges:

- Determining optimal rule
- What about exceptions?
 - Following rules can generate more harm

THE CHARTING METHOD

When a lecture contains information with distinct categories, it makes sense to arrange information into a grid or chart. Information in chart form is easy to review, making this a good system for memorizing facts, making comparisons, and for establishing relationships between concepts.

How to use the Charting Method:

Divide your page into multiple columns with headings.

- For example, for a history class, appropriate column headings would be “Period,” “Event,” “Context,” “People,” and “Significance.”

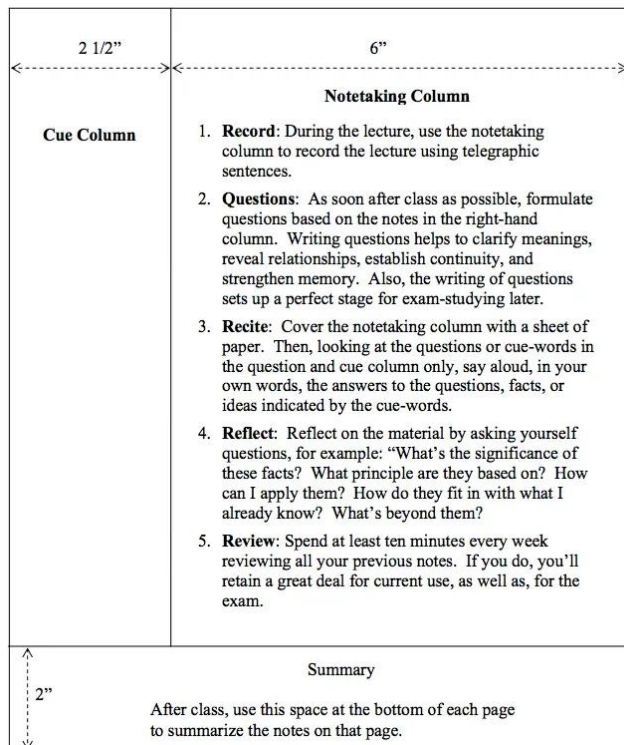
PERIOD	EVENT	CONTEXT	PEOPLE	SIGNIFICANCE
1881–1885	Pacific Railway Construction	- Made confederation possible	Sir John A. Macdonald	- Impact on economy - Facilitated trade between provinces - Joined eastern and western provinces - Made West feel less isolated
1885-1890	Etc.			
1900-1910	Etc.			

THE CORNELL METHOD

This method focuses on identifying main ideas and supporting statements and organizing them into specific sections on the page.

How to use the Cornell Method for taking notes:

Divide the paper into three sections following the example below. It is not necessary to use exact measurements.



Source: Business Insider Source: Business Insider

- To the left of the page, write key terms, points, ideas, dates, and people in the Cue Column.
- Based on these cues, take relevant notes in the large Note Taking Area.
 - Don't use complete sentences. Instead, use abbreviations whenever possible—make sure that you use abbreviations that you can understand and remember.
- After class or when you are finished reading and taking notes, write a summary of the page's notes in the bottom Summary section.
 - It is also useful to think of and write down questions related to the material.
- Use your notes to help you study. Doing this frequently will help you later on.
 - To study, you can cover the notetaking section and, using the cues, try to remember what details you wrote down and why they are important.

Sources:

[Common Note-taking Methods | University of Tennessee at Chattanooga \(utc.edu\)](#)

[The Cornell Note Taking System – Learning Strategies Center](#)

[Cornell: Perfect Way to Take Notes \(businessinsider.com\)](#)

For more help with notetaking strategies or writing assignments, book an appointment with an Academic Writing Specialist at the Writing & Learning Centre:

<https://alexander.mywconline.com>